

**Reuse Proposal  
175 Watts Branch Parkway  
Submitted by the City of Rockville, Maryland  
December 17, 2013**

**Summary:**

The City of Rockville proposes that the County owned property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway be preserved as parkland and incorporated into the adjacent Woottons Mill Park, which is owned and operated by the City of Rockville.

**Justification:**

The City of Rockville and Rockville's residents value open space, passive parkland and active parks throughout the community. The City strives to protect the environment for the benefit of current and future generations of County and Rockville residents. The City also attempts to mitigate the negative impacts of change over time on our current residential neighborhoods. The proposal to incorporate 175 Watts Branch Parkway into the Woottons Mill Park addresses these community priorities and was shared with the County Executive in a September 12, 2013 letter (attached).

**1) Increase parkland**

The 2010 Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Plan identified nine policy recommendations, including the goal to acquire additional park and open space within the City limits. The City's parkland acquisition goal is to make available 18 acres of parkland for every 1000 city residents. To meet that goal, the City would need to add 142 acres of parkland by 2030. The proposed addition of 5.07 acres to Woottons Mill Park is a healthy step toward Rockville's long term park acquisition goal.

The Department of Recreation and Parks established specific criteria to examine in considering acquisition of additional parkland. The property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway meets many of the 23 criteria including:

- Proximity to existing parkland
- Forested property
- Stream or wetland on the property
- Significant park buffers
- Significant stream buffers
- Continuous greenways
- Neighborhood benefit
- Manageable operating costs
- Public access
- Property in good condition
- Citizen support
- Property poses some challenges and constraints for development.

**2) Adequately maintain the area**

The City has examined the level of effort and cost to maintain the land at 175 Watts Branch Parkway as an extension of the Woottons Mill Park. Staff is comfortable with taking on that task, and estimate that the maintenance required to keep the area safe and attractive will cost less than \$10,000 annually.

**3) Protect the environment**

Protecting the environment is a high value for Rockville and Montgomery County residents. Another advantage of incorporating the property at 175 Watts Branch Parkway into Woottons Mill Park is the protection it affords the environment by not developing the land. Development and redevelopment continues to be focused on the transit corridors and higher density areas in an effort to protect the undeveloped green spaces in our community and existing residential neighborhoods. Any development on the site will have implications for stormwater management, the trees on the site, and the nearby stream valley.

Taking this opportunity to preserve open space also aligns with the County Executive's mission to provide Healthy and Sustainable Communities. As a holder of an MS4 Stormwater Permit, Montgomery County is intimately familiar with the need to improve water quality in our local watersheds and ensure the stormwater management system is effective.

**4) Avoid the challenges associated with developing the site**

The site is currently zoned R-150 and is located adjacent to an existing neighborhood of single family homes and townhomes. The memorandum inviting agencies to submit proposals noted the physical and environmental challenges associated with developing the property. They include the slope of the site, the stream valley buffer requirement on the west edge and forest conservation considerations on the north and east edges. In addition, 175 Watts Branch Parkway is land locked with the adjoining parcels owned by the City of Rockville. Maintaining the area as parkland avoids the challenges of development and aligns with the interests of the residential neighbors.

**5) Support the neighbors**

Rockshire Association, Inc., Fallsmead Homes Corporation and individual residents have communicated concerns to the Mayor and Council, City staff and Montgomery County about the future use of 175 Watts Branch Parkway. Correspondence from Rockville residents on this topic is attached to this proposal.

The residents support reuse as parkland and oppose any development on the site. The residents shared the value and popularity of Woottons Mill Park and their concern with any reuse that reduces open space or tree canopy, adds students to the neighborhood schools, or changes the view of the area from residences.

The potential that development would increase traffic congestion on Watts Branch Parkway is another concern. Watts Branch Parkway consists of one travel lane in each direction and is frequently used by drivers as a cut through to avoid I-270. Traffic controls are in place in an

effort to manage the traffic and protect pedestrians in the neighborhood. Any change that further exacerbates traffic congestion would negatively impact the neighborhood.

**Conclusion:**

The City recognizes the significant value of the location and size of the property and understands that there could be significant interest from other agencies in reusing the site. The County Executive will be considering a variety of priorities and needs, so Rockville appreciates attention given to the importance of protecting the environment and maintaining open space. We also place a high priority on addressing the concerns and interests of our residents. The Mayor and Council take seriously the input provided by the two large homeowners associations and individual neighbors and aim to protect their quality of life.

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